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## United States Senate

October 12, 2010

The Honorable Julius Genachowski, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554-0005

Dear Chairman Genachowski:


I am writing to share the concerns I have received from several of my constituents regarding the National Broadband Plan (NBP) and the potential for a rural-urban digital divide. Of particular concern is that the NBP calls for differing goals when it comes to broadband speeds among urban and rural areas. Therefore, I encourage the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to make the 4 megabits per second (mbps) called for in the NBP for rural areas to serve as a floor – and not a ceiling – when it comes to broadband speeds.

Rural communities across our nation play an important role in building a prosperous America, and I strongly believe that access to affordable high-speed Internet is an ever increasing part of the foundation necessary for our rural areas to remain vibrant. These areas already face economic challenges in growing and attracting new jobs; and robust broadband significantly enhances the quality of life of rural Americans by providing for distance education, telemedicine, public safety, and economic development. In that respect, it is critically important that the NBP ensure that our rural constituents are not left behind.

Many recognize that the rapidly changing communications landscape, coupled with the enormous costs associated with rural deployment, necessitates that the government get this issue done correctly for all Americans. As a result, it is important for the goals of the FCC's NBP to not send the wrong message to our nation's rural communities that substandard broadband services are acceptable when compared to urban centers.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I look forward to working with you to ensure that quality broadband services are available for all Americans.

Sincerely,

  
E. Benjamin Nelson  
United States Senator

EBN:jdp

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

November 19, 2010

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

The Honorable E. Benjamin Nelson  
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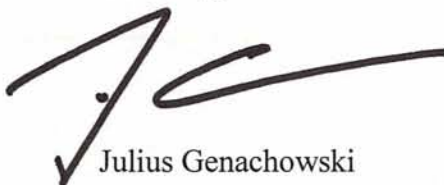
Dear Senator Nelson:

Thank you for your letter expressing concern about the effect of the National Broadband Plan's (NBP) proposed universalization level of 4 Mbps on rural America. The NBP called for a Connect America Fund to enable all U.S. households to access a network that is capable of providing both high-quality voice-grade service and broadband that satisfies the National Broadband Availability Target. Recently, the Commission's Omnibus Broadband Initiative (OBI) staff released a technical paper addressing the Target speed, which I am enclosing for your review. The OBI paper details the reasons for the 4 Mbps level and notes the importance of periodic adjustments as the data supporting the Target continues to evolve.

The 4 Mbps speed is very aggressive and represents one of the highest levels in the world today for universalization, while the NBP's 100 Mbps number is based on a long-range goal. Few residential customers today subscribe to 100 Mbps service, and 4 Mbps currently is the median speed purchased by consumers. Only 6 percent of consumers subscribe to broadband service that is faster than 10 Mbps. Broadband service at 4 Mbps permits consumers to utilize its full benefits, including web browsing, e-mail, two-way video conferencing, and watching educational lectures online in standard definition. The Target speed also is "reasonably comparable" to the broadband service currently provided in urban areas, which is the standard mandated under Section 254 of the Communications Act for universalization. Cost is also a factor that needs to be considered – subsidizing universal 100 Mbps deployment today could cost as much as \$320 billion, which could increase the size of the fund to \$40-50 billion annually, and lead to a universal service fee, on average, of \$30 per month per American household.

Be assured that I am committed to making broadband affordable and attainable by all Americans, regardless of where they live or which service providers they use. I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress as the Commission transforms its universal service policies to ensure that there will be no digital divide in our nation. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Julius Genachowski

Enclosure